

Taking Sides!

Psalm 124, 125; Isaiah 60; John 6⁵¹⁻⁶⁹

*Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.
[John 6⁶⁶]*

One of the subtle changes in the Prayers for the Church Militant between the Book of Common Prayer in (1554 &) 1662 and one of the lasting changes from 1928 in the change from 'partial' to 'impartial'

*We beseech thee also to save and defend all Christian kings, princes and governors; a...: and grant unto her whole Council, and to all that are put in authority under her, that they may truly and **impartially** minister justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of thy true religion and virtue.*

There appears to be less appetite for a God who takes sides. But faith is surely, at heart, taking sides with God and God taking sides with us!

- ✦ The Psalmist celebrates the positives of having God on our side: we are saved from enemies and their anger; being overwhelmed by raging waters; and escaping teeth in search of prey. Instead, the prayer is, **Do good, O Lord, to those who are good and to those who are true of heart.**
- ✦ In exile, Isaiah looks forward to God gathering the nation back together again and the future promise (to be fulfilled in the Magi) of camels bringing **gold and frankincense**. It is such a blessed state of peace that your **gates will always be open** and that nations **will bring you their wealth**. Such will be the renewal of fortune that **the descendants of those who oppress you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet**. We know that this is about God taking sides because Isaiah ends this section by saying, **I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it quickly**.
- ✦ Jesus causes division when he says (deliberately eroding the hornets nest of religious sensitivity by using the name of God YHWH applied to himself): **I AM the bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh**. This isn't cannibalism, but faith that participates in the body and blood of Christ - which is why Jesus goes on to say **it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless**. Faith is a two

way choice - God and ours: **for this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.**

Politicians live with a sort-of dogmatic intolerance: they are comfortable with taking sides and sticking with their decision even when it becomes clear that their views are untenable. The Judiciary face a week when they will have to make a decision drawing together conflicting views.

We live with partiality. At some point even the most indecisive have to settle on what they will have from a menu or what they will wear!

When it comes to faith the modern trend is to leave options open for ourselves while the Church tries to stem the flow of those who would leave. Yet, Jesus responds to the retreating disciples by checking the others are happy to stay: **do you wish to go away?** And Simon says the only sensible thing to say: **Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.**

The positive, deliberate and partisan choice to be a Christian is the most important choice we ever make.